



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
730 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington, MA 02476
Phone: 781-316-3000

webmaster@town.arlington.ma.us

Youth Services Minutes 03/31/2004



MINUTES

Wednesday, March 31, 2004

Present: Donna Dolan, Chair; Mary Deyst, ViceChair; Carlene Newell; Gene Lucarelli; Larry Greco; Cindy Sheridan; Jeannette Mills; Dorothy Williams; Elaine Shea; Elizabeth Oppedisano, ex officio; Dave McKenna, ex officio; Patsy Kraemer, ex officio.

Absent: Joan Robbio. Jack Bowler.

Guests: Phyllis Brown, Joyce Wilson, Margaret Potter, Cindy Bouvier.

- 1) Chairman Donna Dolan welcomed guests and members to the March meeting of the Board of Youth Services. The meeting commenced at 7:10 pm.
- 2) Minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously approved, moved by Elaine Shea, seconded by Dorothy Williams.
- 3) The panel discussion ensued, focusing on the needs of Arlington youth and families, trying to ascertain from our guests and board members what we already know.

Cindy Bouvier, director of health education programs in the schools reported first. She said that they will be doing another Youth Risk Behavior survey next year at the high school. The last one was done in 2000. She also requested that the Board consider donating a portion of the cost for that survey. She itemized some of the highlighted concerns that we learned from the 2000 survey, including:

- *stress level is very high for students.
- *22% of students had experienced having a family member with a serious illness or death.
- *high incidence of teen depression and suicidal ideation
- *17% report having seriously considered suicide.
- *some incidence of dating violence.
- *7% of students reported having met someone from internet contact.
- *33% of students felt they experienced too much pressure.
- *some students report carrying guns or weapons in school.
- *some report having been beaten by a parent or other adult.
- *70% report speeding in cars
- *56.4% report having been drunk within the last 30 days.
- *32.4% report having used drugs.
- *15% report having sniffed glue or paint.
- *some report having used cocaine, speed or other hard drugs.

Cindy also cited the budget cuts from last year as a risk factor for students this year. She said that the loss of teaching staff, loss of a house dean at the high school, loss of the health position at the Ottoson has resulted in much less supervision and connection with the students. She also reported that many students have an inordinate number of study halls (some students have 15 a week) and that results in students leaving the building or wandering around unsupervised. Cindy said that we've also lost the fitness room position at the high school and the peer mediation coordinator.

Cindy said that the CAPP (Child Assault Prevention Program) continues to function – one piece of good news!

Elizabeth Oppedisano gave an overview of the surveys done since the 1980's by the Alcohol & Drug Education Program.

The survey is very consistent in its results and has a high degree of credibility. The surveys have told us that kids continue to drink at a young age and they consistently are willing to go in a car with someone who has been drinking. The last survey showed that the use of marijuana is higher.

Phyllis Brown – AYCC staff person and member of the Arlington Preschool Team – reported on preschool needs. She said that she meets with parents of preschoolers as part of her work with the preschool team. She has discovered that parents are needing more support programs for severe developmental problems that their children experience. She also feels that children with developmental problems should themselves receive support early on for coping with their issues. She reported that immigrant families need support in dealing with the cross-cultural issues that they face with their children.

Phyllis listed parents of children with ADHD diagnosis, explosive disorder diagnosis need support in dealing with the behavior of their children. And finally she said that she sees a recurring theme with parents across all socio-economic lines that they need help in setting limits with children.

Margaret Potter, who is assistant director of Arlington Heights Nursery School presented her observations of parents and children from the perspective of someone working in that arena. She concurred with Phyllis that parents need workshops on discipline and setting limits. She also finds that parents have great expectations of instant success for their children and have less tolerance of imperfection. They tend to think that someone "has dropped the ball" if an imperfection is noted.

She feels that parents need workshops helping them to know what's normal developmental goals and behavior for a given age. She stated that parents are parenting in a vacuum with no extended family available and no context for knowing developmental guidelines. Parents can be in denial that their child is not perfect.

Margaret also stated that some parents who stay home to do childcare can resent doing that if their child isn't succeeding.

Joyce Wilson, Arlington Police detective, reported next on the family violence scene

in Arlington. She said that they received 300-400 calls in 2002. (Some of those calls could indeed be repeat calls from the same family). She said they do not have statistics on the number of restraining orders issued for family violence episodes.

According to Joyce, alcohol and drugs are often a part of the family violence picture. She finds that a majority of people want help and that a very high percentage (75-80%) of kids involved in family violence situations are seen at AYCC. She said that there is no real need for a shelter, but there is an ongoing need for available counseling. She said that there is a very low percentage of men as victims and that the greater need for men is treatment for young men who are abusers and batterers.

After hearing from all the panel members the board then discussed in some detail concerns about safety issues at Arlington High School. Phyllis said that to her things feel on the verge of being out of control at the school. She works with troubled kids at the school. In general it appears that the use of alcohol and drugs has increased significantly. Kids can get anything they want to use in the school. As reported above, schedules are very loose, kids are on cell phones, there is significant graffiti, teachers are overwhelmed and disenchanted, there is a leadership vacuum (due to administrative structure deficits), and there is no guidance for young teachers. Morale is very low and there is a concern as to whether people want to invest in the kids. There is a feeling of disrespect from the kids toward adults and there seems to be few consequences. There is a need for a dress code and a behavior code. Larry reported that he is aware of sexually explicit dressing and behavior occurring at the school. He also reported that there is a rebellion on the part of the kids against the attempted tightening of rules.

These problems at the high school were contrasted to the functioning of the middle school where (despite budget cuts) the structure works fine, there is respected leadership, good guidance staffing, a dynamic and committed staff, and good follow-through in dealing with problems.

The Board agreed to continue the discussion on the issues at the next meeting.

Patsy reported to the Board that the CDBG applications were submitted, requesting funding for the same programs as in past years.

Patsy also gave a budget update, stating that she had been asked to cut \$75,000 from human services – a higher cut than several other departments. She was concerned about the message that was giving vis a vis human services as a priority service for the town. She will be submitting a proposal to the Symmes Hospital Fund Committee for \$150,000 in hopes of

recouping some of the lost service time.

Patsy reported that a "Client Satisfaction Survey" had been completed by AYCC clients and that the results were very positive.

Five hundred twenty dollars has been donated to the BYS gift fund in memory of Larry's father. The Board thanked Larry for this donation request.

The Boys & Girls Club banquet will be May 4, 2004. Patsy will check in with people about going to that in late April.

The next Board meeting will be MONDAY, MAY 3, 6:00 pm. DINNER WILL BE PROVIDED.